



The Bracero Program

1942-1964



Original Bracero Agreement

- Mexico and U.S.
 - August 1943
 - The Bracero program was an agreement between the U.S. and Mexican governments that permitted Mexican citizens to take temporary agricultural work in the United States.
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Scope of Program

- The managed migration, an unprecedented and radical solution to America's labor needs, was prompted by the enormous manpower shortage created by World War II. Over the program's 22-year lifespan, more than 4.5 million Mexican citizens were legally hired for work in the United States, primarily in Texas and California.
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World War II

- During the war, the United States utilized all of its available resources. Men and women of all ages worked day and night in factories and the healthiest and strongest young people were sent to the front lines.





U.S. Labor Shortage

- In the U.S. farm laborers left the fields in droves to seek higher wages in the defense industry.
 - The U.S. turned to Mexico as a supplier of labor.
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Mexico Declares War

- On June 1, 1942, Mexico declared war on the Axis powers and immediately after the U.S. Department of State was asked to approach Mexico officially on the question of the importation of foreign labor. In providing the necessary laborers to the U.S., Mexico believed they could contribute to the Allied war effort and could benefit economically as a country.
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Bracero Agreement

- ❑ On July 1942 the Bracero Program was established by executive order.
 - ❑ It was enacted into Public Law 78 in 1951.
 - ❑ The agreement was expected to be a temporary effort, lasting presumably for the duration of the war.
 - ❑ The Bracero program was not terminated until December 1, 1964-more than nineteen years after the end of World War II.
 - ❑ Braceros worked on farms and on railroads, making it possible for the U.S. economy to meet the challenges imposed by the war effort.
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Mexico's Concerns

- Mexico doubted that a legitimate labor scarcity existed and viewed the Bracero program as a way for the U.S. to obtain cheap labor.
 - Mexican officials were concerned about the deportation and repatriation of Mexicans which occurred in the 1930's and were anxious to prevent another such episode.
 - Mexico did not want to permit their workers to be sent to discrimination prone states in the U.S.
 - Mexico felt that there might be a danger to Mexico's economic development if many thousands of their workers left for the U.S.
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The Official Bracero Agreement

- The final version of the agreement was released on April 26, 1943. The original agreement was signed by representatives from both countries. From Mexico, Ernesto Hidalgo, representative of Foreign Affairs Ministry and Abraham J. Navas, representative of the Ministry of Labor. From the United States, Joseph F. McGurk, Counsel of the American Embassy in Mexico, John Walker, Deputy Administrator of Farm Security Administration, United States Department of Agriculture, And David Mecker, Deputy Director of War Farming Operations.
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General Provisions (in short)

- Mexicans contracting in the U.S. shall not be engaged in any military service.
 - Mexican workers shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind.
 - Transportation and living expenses from the place of origin to destination, and return, as well as expenses incurred in the fulfillment of any requirements of a migratory nature shall be met by the employer.
 - Mexican workers will be furnished without cost to them with hygienic lodgings and the medical and sanitary services enjoyed without cost to them will be identical with those furnished to the other agricultural workers in regions where they may lend their services.
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General Provisions Continued

- ❑ The worker shall be paid in full the salary agreed upon, from which no deduction shall be made.
 - ❑ Mexicans entering the U.S. shall not be employed to displace other workers, or for the purpose of reducing rates of pay previously established.
 - ❑ Contracts must be written in Spanish.
 - ❑ Wages paid to the worker shall be the same as those paid for similar work to other agricultural laborers under the same conditions within the same area.
 - ❑ The worker shall be exclusively employed as an agricultural laborer.
 - ❑ Work of minors under 14 years shall be strictly prohibit.
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General Provisions Continued

- For such time as they are unemployed under a period equal to 75% of the period for which the workers have been contracted they shall receive a subsistence allowance at the rate of \$3.00 per day.
 - The respective agencies of the Government of the U.S. shall be responsible of the safekeeping of the sums contributed by the Mexican workers toward the formation of their Rural Savings Fund. The Mexican government will take care of the security of the savings of the workers.
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Guarantees for Mexicans Under the Agreement

- The agreement between the Mexican and U.S. governments guaranteed certain benefits and protections for Mexican workers, including free sanitary housing, medical treatment, bathing facilities, transportation, wages equal to those of American farm workers, and a contract written in Spanish.
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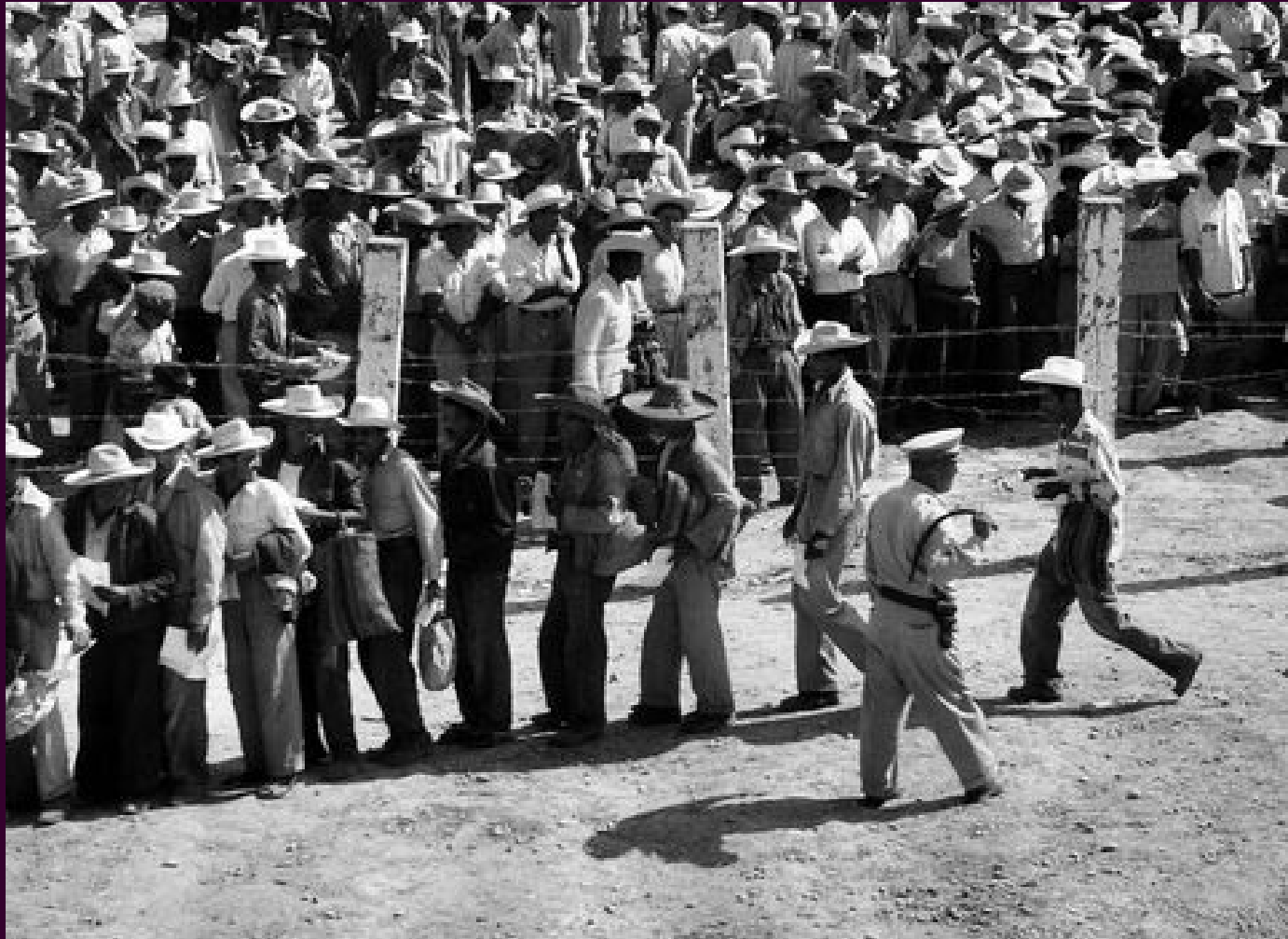


Recruitment

- ❑ Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua, across from El Paso, Texas, became historic recruitment sites.
 - ❑ The recruitment centers themselves became crowded with thousands of Mexicans who were unemployed and who wanted to go to the U.S.
 - ❑ Because of the overwhelming numbers of applicants, it became very difficult to obtain permits to enter the program.
 - ❑ In many instances a bribery system was set up. Often those who learned the ropes and who could bribe the officials were selected as braceros.
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Prospective braceros walking to a collection point
in Mexico



Guard at collection point



1956, Prospective braceros being inspected

Upon arrival to the United States, braceros were taken to processing centers where they were searched for vegetables, weapons, marijuana or similar contraband and sprayed with DDT by Department of Agriculture personnel



Bracero card issued to Jesús Campoya in 1951 in El Paso, Texas.

No. L 216290
ALIEN LABORER'S PERMIT
and
IDENTIFICATION CARD


Name: CAMPOLLA-Caldaron, Jesus
Home address: San Diego, Mpio. Alamo
Chihuahua
Date and place of birth: Mar 18, 1922
San Diego, Chih.
Nationality: MEXICAN
Identifying marks: None

Admitted under
15
(Name of employer)
For employment as AGRICULTURAL WORKER
in (area) EL PASO CO., N. MEX.
Date to which admitted DEC 17 1950

Expirations:
JUN 22 1951 *Del Socorro*
SEP 8 1951 *Demeco*

Temporary departures and readmissions:

AUTHORITY



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Illegal Workers

- Many Mexican workers who were not able to obtain permits chose to enter the U.S. illegally.
 - The number of illegal's who entered the U.S. during the tenure of the Bracero program was equal to or surpassed the number of braceros.
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Mexican Migration to the United States

Year:	Braceros:
1942	4,203
1947	19,632
1952	197,100
1956	445,197
1961	291,420
1967	7,703

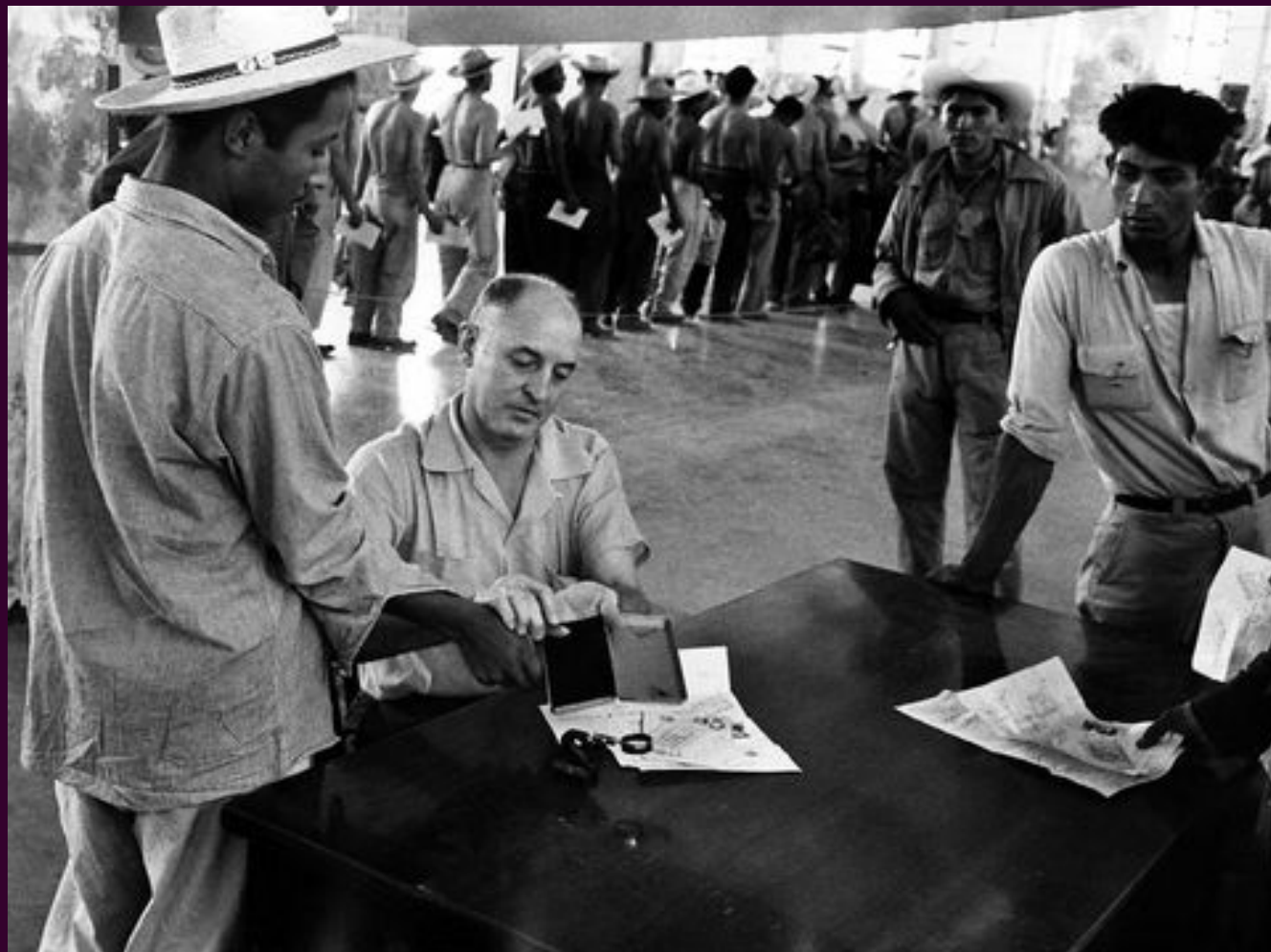


Braceros being recruited in El Paso, Texas



Who were the Braceros?

- The majority of the braceros were experienced farm laborers. They stopped working their land and growing food for their families with the illusion that they would be able to earn a vast amount of money on the other side of the border.
 - The braceros converted the agricultural fields of America into the most productive in the planet.
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Bracero being fingerprinted



What is a Bracero?

- “Generally speaking, the Latin-American migratory worker going into west Texas is regarded as a necessary evil, nothing more nor less than an unavoidable adjunct to the harvest season. Judging by the treatment that has been accorded him in that section of the state, one might assume that he is not a human being at all, but a species of farm implement that comes mysteriously and spontaneously into being coincident with the maturing of cotton, that requires no upkeep or special consideration during the period of its usefulness, needs no protection from the elements, and when the crop has been harvested, vanishes into the limbo of forgotten things-until the next harvest season rolls around. He has no past, no future, only a brief and anonymous present.”

From *Latin Americans in Texas*, by Pauline R. Kibbe, The University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1948.



Push/Pull Factors for Braceros

□ Push:

- Two million peasants lost their lives in the Mexican Revolution of 1910. By the late 1930's, when the crops in Mexico began yielding insufficient harvest and employment became scarce, Mexican workers were forced to look for other means of survival.
 - The occurrence of this grave situation in Mexico coincided with the emergence of a demand in manual labor in U.S. brought about by WW II.
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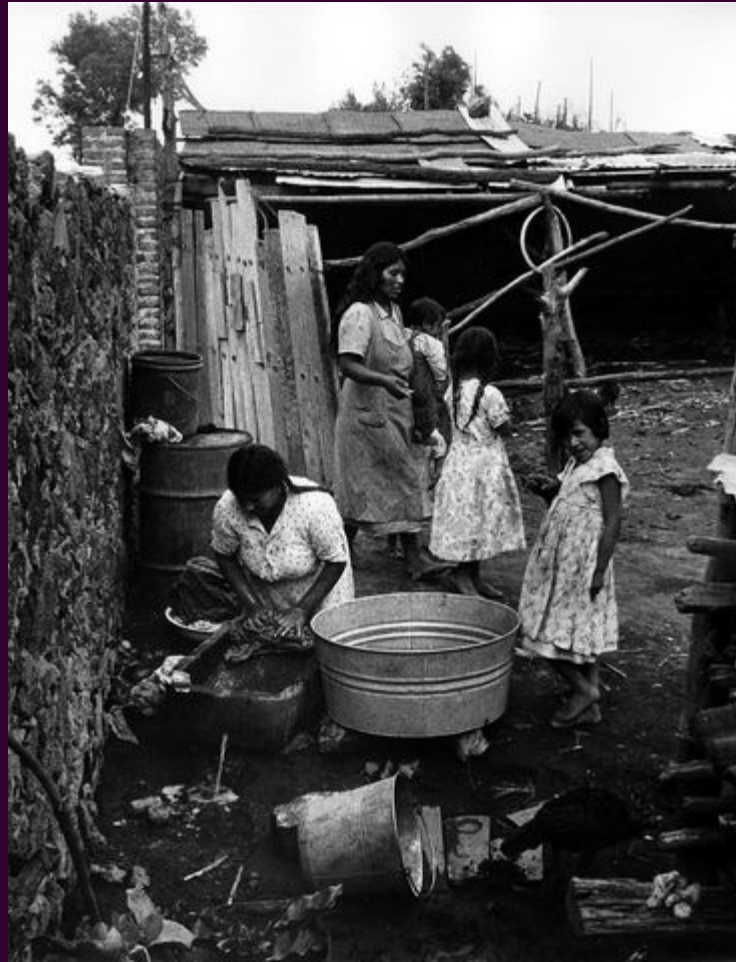
“This is one of the two rooms for a family of nine people living in San Mateo-about 20 miles south of Mexico City. The other room serves as a kitchen, work room, and storeroom. When work is available in the village, a Mexican laborer may earn about 10 pesos per day. Because of this, the wage earner of the family here wants to go to the US as a farm laborer where he may earn much more anywhere from 4 weeks to 6 months.”



Push/Pull Factors

□ Pull:

- The Mexican government hoped the braceros would learn new agricultural skills which would benefit the development of Mexico's own agricultural programs.
 - The Mexican government foresaw the possibility that the braceros would earn good wages in the U.S., bring the money back to Mexico and stimulate the Mexican economy.
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Washing clothes in a Mexican village



Benefits for U.S. of Employing Mexican Nationals

- American workers often worked as families. This meant growers had to supply housing for the family.
 - Mexican workers were all men and came in groups. For growers, it was easier to provide transportation and supply barracks or rooms for single men. It was also easier to transport Mexican nationals from farm to farm without any difficulty.
 - Wages for Mexican nationals were set by growers, not in a supply and demand situation and not in collective bargaining.
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This is housing provided by a Texan farmer for 200 braceros in this long building, with the beds made out of stretched canvas, upper and lower. Such close living conditions make for high incidences of respiratory illnesses among the braceros.



Short Handle Hoe



- During the Bracero program the short handle hoe was widely used. A regular long-handled hoe could have been used, but it was considered harmful to the plants. The short handle hoe required the user to work in a bent over position and crawl along the dusty rows of plants for ten to twelve hours a day. At the end of the shift, it was nearly impossible to stand up straight.
- The use of this tool is now illegal in most states, although you will still find farm workers using it specially in South Texas and in New Mexico.



A Bracero worker in the field holding a short-handled hoe.



Discrimination in Texas

- Although the Bracero agreement contained stipulations with regard to health, housing, food, wages, and working hours, most were disregarded by both U.S. government and the growers. The requirement that Mexican nationals not be discriminated against was also disregarded. In the state of Texas alone, Mexicans were discriminated against to such an extent that the Mexican government forbade the use of its nationals in the fields in Texas.
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Racism Against the Braceros

- The braceros suffered all types of abuses not only from racist extremists but by the average American.
 - Some restaurants had signs to prohibit the entrance of Mexicans. If restaurants did allow the entrance of Mexicans, they were forced to eat in the back of the kitchen.
 - Segregation was noticeable in the theaters where Mexicans were only allowed in the upper sections designated for African Americans.
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Signs like this were commonly posted in
business's in Texas and other states



American Resentment

- When American farm workers walked off a job to protest poor wages or working conditions, farm owners would import braceros to harvest crops, destroying the bargaining power of the American farm workers (although this use of braceros was expressly prohibited in the Bracero Program).
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“Wetbacks”

- The Mexican illegal alien has been popularly called a “wetback.”
 - The term originated from the fact that the Rio Grande forms much of the long border between the U.S. and Mexico, and many Mexican illegal aliens have crossed into the U.S. by swimming or wading the river.
 - Many growers hired “wetbacks” rather than braceros because wetbacks were more manageable and because as illegal aliens they had absolutely no rights.
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The photograph shows braceros working the fields, where they would stay from sunrise to sunset. Thousands of braceros were brought in to perform stoop labor, a task that causes back injuries resulting from the constant strain of bending over all day. Medical clinics reported backache as the most common ailment among the braceros. Since no machine has been able to replace stoop labor, it continues today.



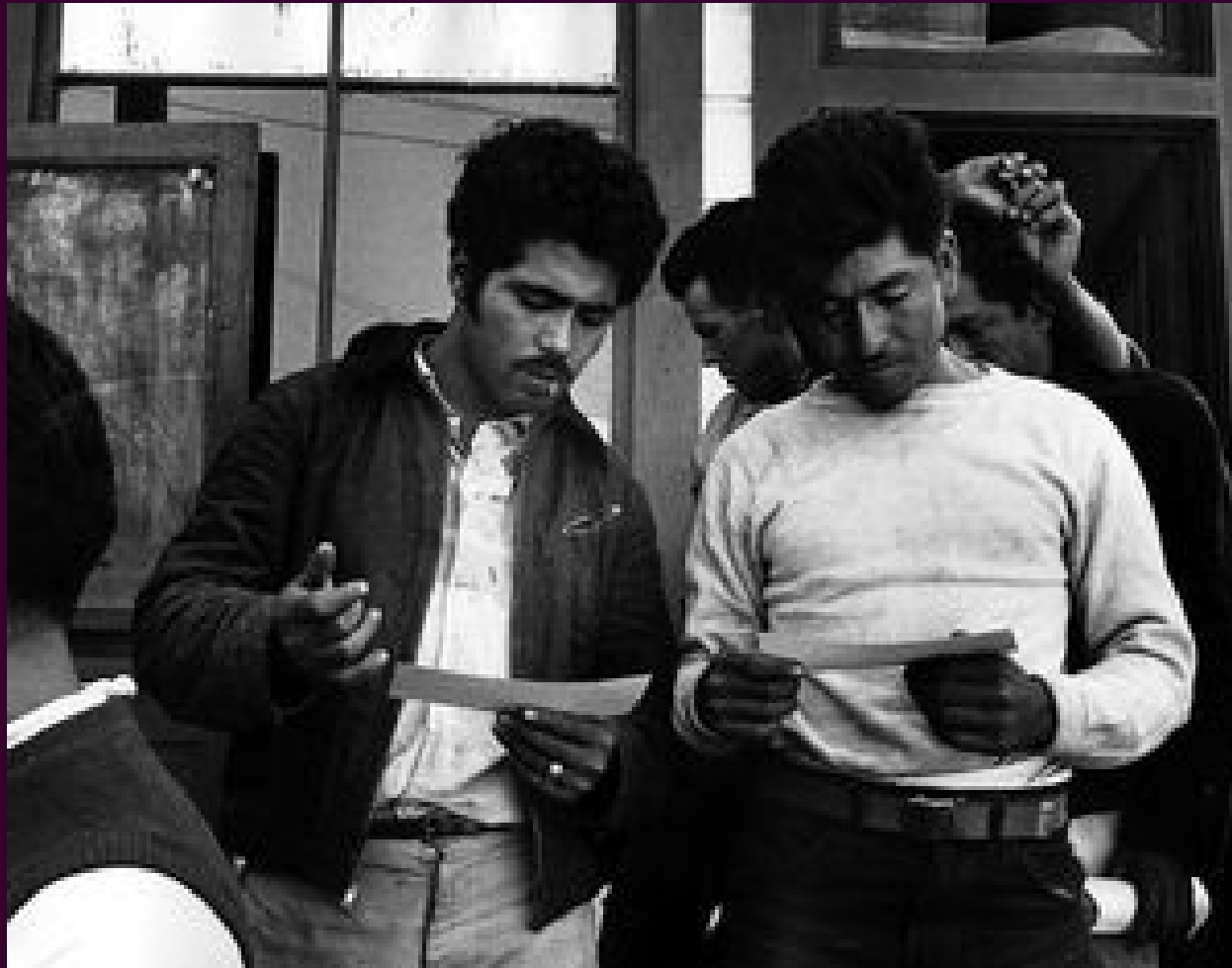
End of the Program

- By the 60's, an excess of “illegal” agricultural workers along with the introduction of the mechanical cotton harvester, destroyed the practicality and attractiveness of the bracero program.
 - The braceros returned home. Unable to survive in their communities in Mexico, many continued to cross the border to work farms and ranches in the U.S.
 - Today you will still find braceros. They continue to be one of the most exploited labor groups in the U.S.
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Abuses of the Program

- As part of their contract, braceros agreed to have ten percent of their wages withheld and placed in a fund controlled by the Mexican government.
 - An overwhelming majority of the workers never received compensation and the whereabouts of the funds remain unknown.
 - Many former braceros now live in dire poverty, abandoned by both governments.
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Braceros receiving pay checks



Effects of Program Today

- The Bracero program has had lasting effects on both the United States and Mexico. It helped establish in what has become a common migration pattern: Mexican citizens entering the U.S. for work, going home to Mexico for some time, and returning again to the U.S. to earn more money.
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Bracero Project: Recovering the History of Migrant Farm Workers

- The history of the braceros has long been ignored by both Mexico and the United States.
 - Once they were no longer needed in the U.S., the Mexicans who participated in the Bracero Program had to return to their homelands without ever receiving, to this day, recognition for their valuable contributions to the U.S.
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Bracero Project: Recovering the History of Migrant Farm Workers

- Once the history is recovered, then we can contribute to the recognition of the efforts made by the Mexican farm laborers in the United States. If this recognition is achieved, then the old braceros (and the future braceros) will receive dignity and maybe, compensation for their efforts.
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LOS BRACEROS

1942-1964



- Securing justice for the braceros, their children and widows, is a necessary step in the process of reconciling the histories of the United States and Mexico.



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